



**The Sunday of the Holy Fathers of the Seven Ecumenical Councils
Which the Holy Church Celebrates on the Sunday Falling Between July 13-19.¹**

On the Sunday that falls from the 13th to the 19th of the present month, we chant the Service to the Holy and God-bearing Fathers who came together in the Seven Ecumenical Councils, that is: the First Council, of the 318 Fathers who assembled in Nicea in 325 to condemn Arius, who denied that the Son of God is consubstantial with the Father; the Fathers of the First Council also ordained that the whole Church should celebrate Pascha according to the same reckoning; the Second Council of the 150 Fathers who assembled in Constantinople in 381 to condemn Macedonius, Patriarch of Constantinople, who denied the divinity of the Holy Spirit; the Third Council of the 200 Fathers who assembled in Ephesus in 431, to condemn Nestorius, Patriarch of

¹ In the Russian usage, only the first six Councils are commemorated today.

Constantinople, who called Christ a mere man and not God incarnate; the Fourth Council, of the 630 who assembled in Chalcedon in 451, to condemn Eutyches, who taught that there was only one nature, the divine, in Christ after the Incarnation, and Dioscorus, Patriarch of Alexandria, who illegally received Eutyches back into communion and deposed Saint Flavian, Patriarch of Constantinople, who had deposed Eutyches; the Fifth Council in 525, of the 165 who assembled in Constantinople the second time, to condemn Origen and Theodore of Mopsuestia, the teacher of Nestorius; the Sixth Council in 680, of the 170 who assembled in Constantinople for the third time, to condemn the Monothelite heresy, which taught that there is in Christ but one will, the divine; and the Seventh Council in 787, of the 350 who assembled in Nicea for the second time to condemn Iconoclasm.

*The Resurrection Dismissal Hymn and Kontakion of the Tone of the Week
Dismissal Hymn. Plagal of Fourth Tone*

MOST glorified art Thou, O Christ our God, Who hast established our Fathers as luminous stars upon the earth, and through them didst guide us all to the true Faith. O Most Merciful One, glory be to Thee.

*Another Dismissal Hymn. First Tone
While Gabriel was saying*

YE faithful, let us honor the Seven Holy Councils, * which Christ God the Wisdom has set as His house's seven pillars; * through them we have all received unchanged * the undefiled traditions of the Faith. * As our anchor, we hold fast to their right decrees, * while crying unto the Fathers: * Glory to Him that illumined you all. * Glory to Him that magnified you. * Glory to Him that hath strengthened the Orthodox Faith through you.

Kontakion. Plagal of Fourth Tone

THE preaching of the Apostles and the doctrines of the Fathers confirmed the one Faith in the Church. And wearing the garment of truth woven from the theology on high, she rightly divideth and glorifieth the great mystery of piety.

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Τὸ Ἅγιον Μανδαίλον
THE ICON NOT MADE BY HANDS
(See August 16)

With the condemnation of Iconoclasm at the Seventh Ecumenical Council in Nicea 787, the 350 God-bearing Fathers not only explicitly confirmed the preceding Six Councils and their Canons but also, since they taught nothing new, reaffirmed in every detail the content, both written and unwritten, of Apostolic Tradition.

The Icon of the Holy Face, or the Holy Napkin, is the summit of the work of the holy Fathers of the Seven Ecumenical Councils. Explicit is the confirmation that the making of holy Icons is “perfectly concordant” with the Apostolic preaching since the gift of the Icons confirms “the true and not imaginary incarnation of God the Word” (*The Definition of the Holy Great and Oecumenic Council, the Second Assembled at Nice*, quoted in *The Seventh General Council*, tr. J. Mendham; London Wm. Ed. Painter, 342 Strand; 1850, p. 439).

The Fathers meeting at Nicea for the second time in 787 proclaim that all that the Church teaches and does rests upon holy Tradition.

“We affirm that we preserve all the traditions of the Church which have been handed down to us in her, whether written or unwritten, without innovation; of which one is the formation of representative images, which is perfectly concordant with the history of the evangelical preaching in the conformation of the true and not imaginary incarnation of God the Word, and which conduces no less to edification than the other. For those things which are mutually illustrative of each other have mutually their impressions from each other” (Ibid, p. 439).

When the Apostles preached that Jesus Christ had fulfilled each prophecy contained in the Canonical Scriptures as found in the God-breathed Septuagint relating to the Messiah, the Apostles declare Jesus Christ to be “the expectation of nations” (Gen. 49:11 LXX). Saint David sees Christ’s glory and cries out, “God shall come visibly, yea, our God, and shall not keep silence” (Ps. 49:3 LXX). Speaking with the ambassadors of King Abgar of Edessa, afflicted with leprosy, the Lord Christ takes a wet towel, dries His face with it, and then hands it over to the King’s artist who was unable to capture the Lord’s face on paper, suffused as it was with light. When this Napkin touched the Abgar, the King was, except for a spot on his forehead, healed of his leprosy by the Holy Napkin.

In the Icon not made by hands we noetically adore, in very deed, the hypostasis, or person, of the Son of God. We do not see His human nature alone; we see His divine and human natures unconfusedly united in the one hypostasis of the Son of God. Our eyes behold Christ, “Light of Light, True God of True God, begotten, not made, one in essence with the Father.” Through this icon our eyes are elevated to adore the Holy Trinity for the Holy Spirit is also consubstantial with the Father.

Today we behold the Son of God Whom Adam saw in the Garden of Eden, and then lost sight of Him through sin. When we hear, “By the Word of the Lord were the heavens established and all the might of them by the Spirit of His mouth” (Ps. 32:6 LXX), the words of the Prophet David proclaim the beginning of all things in God the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We see in the Icon of the Holy Napkin Our Christ Who is *Theanthropos*, God Who has forever united Himself with our human nature in the womb of His Virgin Mother, our Panagia. In her womb our blood became united, without any mingling, with his Blood in such a way that this miracle of the Incarnation, never to be repeated, is outside the power of either human thought or speech. We, by faith, are His, and He is ours.

Our souls are created by our Saviour and then united with a human body after that body is formed in our mother’s womb. Every mother’s womb holds a human soul and body, whose destiny is to become ‘god, after God,’ so say the holy Fathers.

Our Lord took our human will and united it with His Divine will so that through this union our wills can be deified and saved, first in the Church’s Baptism and then, throughout our lives in the Church’s myriad mysteries. All this He did “for us men and for our salvation;” He died our death so that, in the mysteries of Church, we may live His Life. O wonder! our dying life is transfigured by and becomes united with His own life-giving Life.

We have spoken, in narrative form, of the victories of the first Six Ecumenical Councils. In 787 the 350 Fathers of the Seventh Council at Nicea confirm that these doctrines and the Icon of the Holy Face are grounded in one holy Tradition. We spell out in the texts of the Gospel the wonders of our salvation, and we also show our salvation in the first Icon of Christ, the holy Napkin, to a dying world so that it, too, may be summoned to life in Christ. Our salvation comes from “the true and not

imaginary incarnation of God the Word” as the holy Fathers proclaim. The Holy Napkin shows to all this Apostolic Truth: *if He did not take flesh and become, in His flesh, depictable, we could not use colors and paint Him as we do.* He truly took our flesh and so we have icons.

The Kontakion of the Sunday of Orthodoxy, which was penned on the very moment the Saint Theodora the Empress (whose relics are incorrupt in Corfu) proclaimed the Victory of Orthodoxy, closes with these words: “As for us, confessing our salvation, we record it in deed and word.”

The Mandyllion (the Holy Napkin) is a record of our salvation *as a deed*. He became man, say Ss. Irenaeus and Athanasius the Great, that we might become god. He is God by nature; we are gods only by adoption and grace. He humbled Himself to wrap our flesh around Him in the womb of His Virgin Mother; He took a face that we might see Him face to face and draw untold power from the vision of Him.

“My heart said unto Thee: I will seek the Lord. My face hath sought after Thee; Thy face, O Lord will I seek”(Ps.26:9 LXX). Beloved, He is the only One Who loves us; He wears our face. He opens His mouth and, with a human voice, speaks words we can understand. We do not hear claps of thunder from a mountain, nor is our vision darkened by clouds. He wishes to draw near in love, so that we may respond to Him in love by putting Him on in Baptism, and by eating and drinking Him in the holy Mysteries of His Body and Blood.

Does it come to this...that we cannot get enough of Him? Do we make the Church our home and our homes a Church? There are many ways in which to work on our Transfiguration here so that when He appears, those who love His appearing will be recognized by Him by their likeness to Him. May that likeness be a likeness in every way, lacking nothing of Him in us so that we may be able to “abide before the face of God in the age to come” (Ps. 60: 7 LXX).

And to our God be glory.



OUR MOST HOLY
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